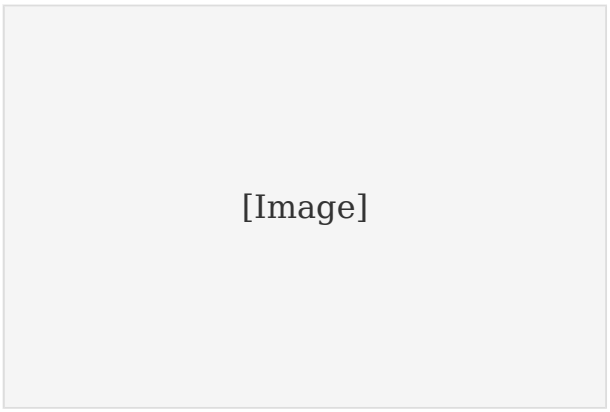
Dispensationalism, what is it? - Watchman Ministries

Dispensationalism, what is it, and what does it teach?

Dispensationalism teaches that there is a distinction between Israel of the Old Testament, and the Church of the New Testament, that the Scriptures must be divided to separate between works of the Law in the Old Testament, and the Grace of God in the New Testament, misapplying the term **“rightly dividing the word of truth”** as found in 2 Timothy 2:15.

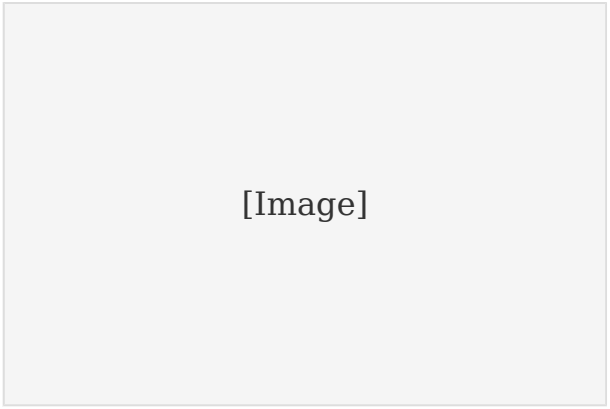
It teaches that Christians are not bound by Mosaic law. It holds to a belief in premillennialism, Christian Zionism, and a rapture of the Church that will happen before the Second Coming of Christ, generally seen as happening before a period of tribulation.

The origin of this theory can be traced to three Jesuit priests;



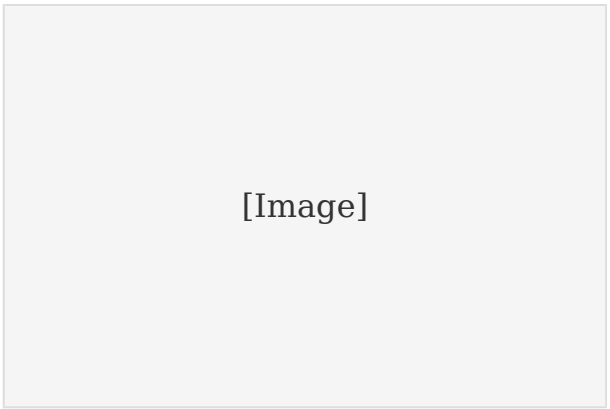
Francisco Ribera

(1) Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), from Salamanca, Spain. Ribera was a brilliant student who specialized in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He received a doctorate in theology from the University of Salamanca and joined the Jesuit Order in 1570 when he was just 33 years old.



Robert Bellarmine

(2) Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) one of the best-known Jesuit apologists, promoted similar theories to Ribera in his published work between 1581 and 1593 entitled Polemic Lectures Concerning the Disputed Points of the Christian Belief Against the Heretics of This Time,



Manuel Lacunza

(3) Manuel Lacunza (1731–1801). David Pio Gullon has done a comprehensive study of Lacunza's eschatology as found in his monumental work, La Venida del Mesias en Gloria y Magestad (The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty).

The following are some of Gullon's conclusions regarding Lacunza.

"Manuel Lacunza was an avowed futurist and loyal Roman Catholic. Lacunza's futuristic eschatology included the following:

• The fulfillment of Revelation 4-22 is still future. • The three and one half times of Antichrist's dominion are literal.

• The 144,000 will be literal Jews.

• Literal Israel will be re-gathered and converted during the great

tribulation which will take place immediately before the Second Coming. God will then literally fulfill all his covenant promises to the literal nation of Israel.

• The millennium will be a period of peace on earth where people will live in their mortal bodies.

• During the millennium the literal sacrificial system will be reestablished in the literal Jerusalem Temple."

Contemporary Protestant expositors of Bible prophecy have borrowed extensively from Lacunza. It is a sobering fact that many of the views on prophecy that are presently being taught by conservative Protestants have been borrowed from a Roman Catholic Jesuit priest!! Lacunza, however, departed from the run-of-the-mill futurists of his day by saying that:
• The coming of Christ will precede the millennium (Ribera and others were Amillennialists)
• The final Antichrist will not be a single individual but an apostate system that will arise at the end of the age.

In Lacunza's own words:

"If we expect to see accomplished in one man all that is said of the beast, with all that is announced to us in so many other parts of Scripture; it is much to be feared, that, all which is written will take place, and such an Antichrist not appearing, we shall be looking for him when he is already in the house. Likewise it is to be feared, that this idea which we have formed of Antichrist may prove the chief cause of the very carelessness in which men shall be found when the day of the Lord arrives."Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra [pseudonym], The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty (Dublin: Wm. Curry Jun., & Co., 1833), pp. 10-11.

To make a long story short, Lacunza's work found its way to England around the same time as Burgh, Todd, Maitland, and Newman were expounding their futuristic views. And in a rather strange and unexpected twist of historical providence, his work was translated into English by Edward Irving. Irving's translation of Lacunza's work was first published in 1833, the very year the Oxford Tractarian movement got underway.

The writings of Ribera and Bellarmine, which contain the precedence upon which the theory of Dispensationalism is founded, were originally written to counteract

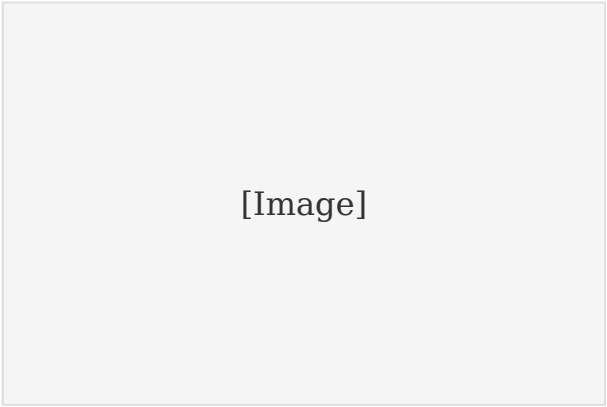
the Protestant reformers' interpretation of the Book of the Revelation, which, according to the reformers, exposed the Pope as Antichrist and the Roman Catholic Church as the whore of Babylon.

Dispensationalism was systematized and promoted by John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren in the mid-19th century.

It began its spread in the United States during the late 19th century through the efforts of evangelists such as James Inglis, James Hall Brookes, Dwight L. Moody, the efforts of the Niagara Bible Conference, and the establishment of Bible Institutes. With the dawn of the 20th century, C. I. Scofield introduced the Scofield Reference Bible, which solidified dispensationalism in the United States.

Dispensationalism has become popular in Protestant evangelism, commonly found in nondenominational Bible churches such as the Baptist, Pentecostal, and Charismatic groups.

There are many false doctrines that dispensationalism teaches. Still, today's article will focus primarily upon the teaching that salvation in the Old Testament was works-oriented, and in the New Testament is by the Grace of God.



This idea teaches that God is a respecter of persons, that Jesus is a shepherd of two flocks, and that He is the head of two bodies, each of which He treats differently, having different sets of rules for salvation.

But all this is contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture that God is no respecter of persons. Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11.

One can simply read Hebrews 11 to see clearly that every person that will ever be saved from Adam till today is saved by Grace through faith in Christ, the Lamb of God slain from the foundations of the earth.

Not only so, but the second and third chapters of Roman's, and the fourth. Indeed, the whole book of Romans gives a death blow to the wicked idea that God is partial and that He favors some people more than others.

This idea that God has special blessings for one nation of earth that He has not for others, no matter whether that one nation be called Jews, Israelites, Anglo-Saxons, Englishmen, or anything else, is a direct denial of the gospel of the Grace of God.

For **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."** Gal. 3:28, 29.

If you are Christ's then you are Abraham's seed, and therefore a true Israelite.

"but now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Eph. 2:13.

It is the Gentiles in this text who were **"far off".**

God never made any covenant with the Gentiles and never gave the Gentiles any promises. Paul says that to the Israelites pertains to **"the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises."** Rom. 9:4.

The Jews have everything.

So what then is left for the Gentiles? Nothing whatever.

Says the same apostle:

"Wherefore remember that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh [notice carefully, they were gentiles in the past], who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ [notice, when they were gentiles they were without Christ], being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Eph 2:11-12.

There never was a real Jew in the sight of God who was not a believer in Christ. And every true believer in Christ is a Jew in the Bible sense of the term.

Jesus was the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world. It was always His mission to gather together the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and those lost sheep have spread abroad among all the nations of the world, those nations being the Gentiles.

Many people imagine that the first covenant was made with the Jews and the second with the Gentiles. But this is a great error.

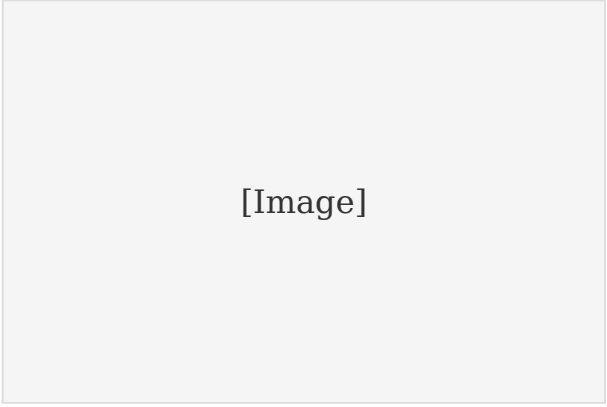
So does that mean that a Gentile is shut out from salvation?

Yes, as Gentile he is.

So long as he remains a Gentile, which is but another term for heathen, he can have no part in the things of God.

Thus being reconciled to God they are **“no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God”** (Eph. 2:19), and their **“citizenship is in Heaven, from whence they look for the Saviour”**. Phil. 3:20.

The Gentiles were **“aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:”** but the Gospel of Christ is



the means of their naturalization, so that now they belong to the true Israel of God, if they are of faith, and are **“fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.”** Eph. 3:6.

Therefore, true Jews are none other than Christians. For **“He is a Jew, which is one inwardly.”** Rom 2:29

There never was a real Jew in the sight of God who was not a believer in Christ. And every true believer in Christ is a Jew in the Bible sense of the term. Abraham,

the father of the Jewish nation was the first gentile of note to whom the Gospel was preached, and it was the true Gospel as it was given to him by God Himself, and he rejoiced in Christ as a result.

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.” John 8:56.

“And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed… That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith… Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” Galatians 3:8, 14,16.

It is Christ who is the seed of Abraham, in whom all nations shall be blessed, therefore, if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed and a true **“Jew”**.

Those who accept Christ, **“are”** Abraham’s seed, and there is none other that will be saved; those who are Abraham’s seed, are Israel, if not, then you have not Christ, and are not included in the seed, and therefore not included in the covenant.

“But Christ is all, and in all”

“Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.” Col 3:11; Also Gal 3:27-28; Eph 1:23, 2:15-16; (I Cor 12:13)

“He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” Rom.2:29

Therefore, the 12 tribes of Israel are made up of **“ALL”** His faithful followers since Adam’s fall.

The Olive Tree.

I believe that a quick look at the olive tree as Paul describes it in Romans 11 might be in order at this time.

This olive tree, with all its branches, provides us with an excellent portrayal of true Israel, and this can best be understood in light of the promise that God made to Abraham and his Seed.

“…He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed,

which is Christ.” Galatians 3:16

The seed of Abraham is Christ, and we are to understand that all who have put on Christ as Lord and Saviour are included in Israel, and are eligible to receive the inheritance by faith, confirming once again that God has **“ONE”** people, made up of all Nations, both Jew and Gentile.

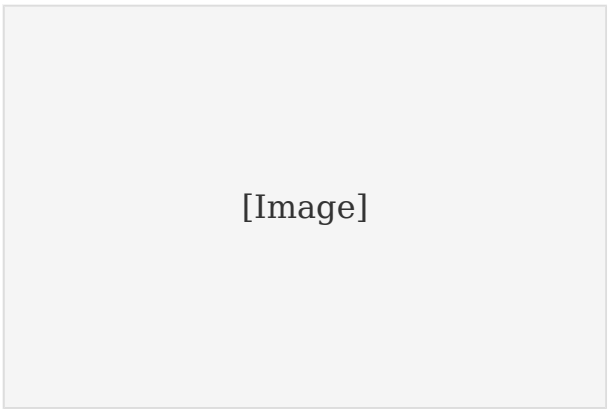
And it must not be forgotten, that although there are many thousands included in the seed, there is only one seed, for they are all one in Christ, For it is Christ who is the Seed.

And so the Kingdom of Christ is illustrated by just **“ONE”** olive tree which bears good fruit.

This olive tree has several different types of branches, but they all belong to the same tree.

There are natural branches that are retained in the tree; these branches represent people from the literal Jewish Nation who accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour, the Apostles Peter James and John are examples of this type of person.

There are also natural branches that were cut off from the tree, these are those people of the Jewish nation who rejected their Messiah; Judas Iscariot for example. There are also natural branches that are grafted back into the tree, these represent literal Jews who at first rejected their Messiah, but then later accepted Him. Saul of Tarsus is an example of this type of person.



There are wild olive branches that are grafted into the tree, these represent the Gentiles who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and wild olive branches that could potentially be cut off from the tree. These are the Gentiles who have departed from Jesus and abandoned their relationship with Him.

And finally, there are wild olive branches that are grafted back into the tree, these represent Gentiles who forsook Christ, and after pleading for mercy and forgiveness, and forsaking their sins were again accepted back into the tree.

So how many trees are there? There is only one tree, and that tree is composed of both Jews and Gentiles.

The key is in verses 20 and 23, where we are told that to be a part of the tree means to believe in Jesus. To be cut off from the tree means to reject Jesus.

The root and the trunk of the tree symbolize Jesus, and if we are connected to the trunk and the root then we will bear fruit.

“And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert graffed in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be graffed in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in: for God is able to graff them in again.” Romans 11:17-23.

In verse 24 it is said that **“all Israel shall be saved”**. What can this mean when God says that all Israel will be saved; what is the context, what does He mean when He says “ALL” Israel?

He means **“ALL”** the branches on the tree, both the natural olive branches and the wild olive branches, that is all the people from all nations who accept Christ as Lord and Saviour, whether they be Jew or Gentile.

There is only one tree that all His people will be cultivated into.

Blindness in part is the lot of Israel at present because at present Israel exists only in part. Israel can be made full and complete only by the coming in of the Gentiles, that is, as many as will believe.

When the fulness of the Gentiles has come in, then will that which is perfect be come, even the perfect day.

“And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the

Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins." Romans 11:26-27). Compare also Acts 3:24-26.

For in no other way can it be understood that "ALL" Israel will be saved.

Note once again the connection in verses 25 and 26. **"Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved."** That is to say, all Israel cannot be saved except by the bringing in of the Gentiles; which is the same as saying that prospective Israelites are now reckoned as Gentiles, but that in due time they will all come in; **"and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd." "We know that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin; as it is written, there is none righteous, no not one." "There is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."** (Romans 3:9,10,22,23).

Recommended reading. "Futurisms Incredible Journey" Pastor Stephen Bohr.

Another futurist doctrine. The Pretribulation Rapture.

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